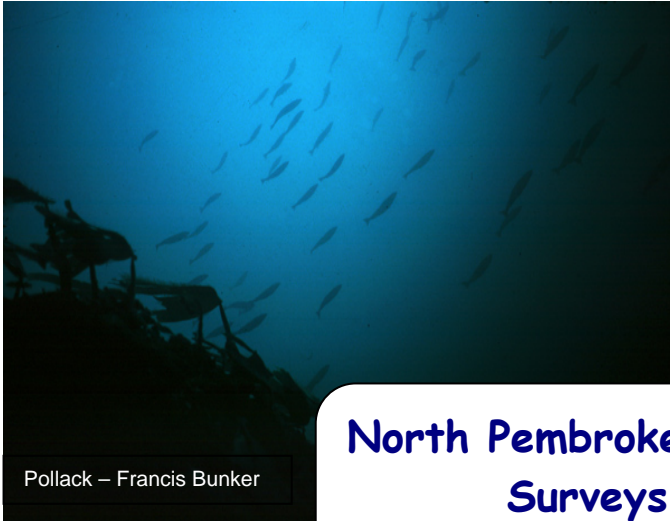




MARINE CONSERVATION
SOCIETY



Pollack – Francis Bunker



Abercastle bay – John Woolford

**North Pembrokeshire Seasearch
Surveys 2002-04
Summary Report**



Spider crab – Francis Bunker



Crawfish – Jon Moore



Pink sea fan – Jon Moore



Sponge crab – Jon Moore

Introduction to North Pembrokeshire

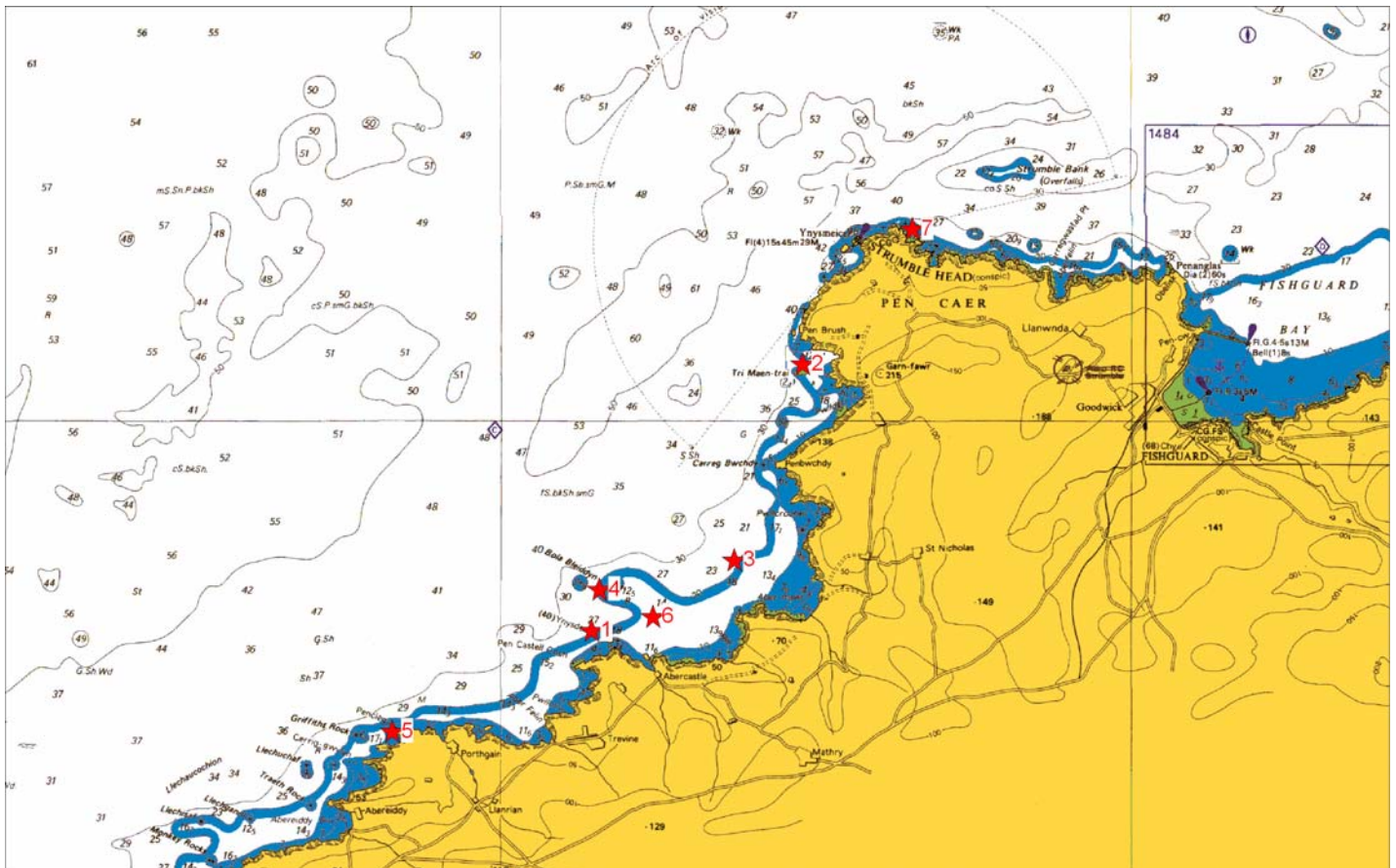
North Pembrokeshire has, until the last few years, remained relatively unknown and little dived, unlike the south and west of the county. Mention Pembrokeshire to most divers and they think of Skomer Island Marine Nature Reserve, and the surrounding area. The Pembrokeshire marine SAC boundary lies just north of St. Davids Head, near Abereiddy, and this is where the diving and recording for Pembrokeshire usually stops. We are hoping that, through Seasearch surveys, it will be realised that north Pembrokeshire is an extremely important and valuable area for monitoring marine life. This report is a summary of Seasearch forms completed over the last three years, covering the coastline from Site 5 at Porthgain (see chart below) north to Strumble Head, near Fishguard (Site 7).

Abercastle is a tiny fishing village situated between St. Davids and Strumble Head. It is a useful launching site, and the majority of dives undertaken were within its vicinity. Offshore reefs dominate the area, each ranging in depth from 8-30 metres, and six of the sites in this report are from bedrock reef habitats, with the exception of Site 5, which is a 20 metre long, steep walled narrow gully with a bottom depth of 16 metres. At this site,

large colonies of the nationally scarce scarlet and gold star coral (*Balanophyllia regia*) were observed. It is planned in the future to survey some of the sediment habitats around Abercastle, which also appear to be very rich in life.

The first Seasearch event held in the area was organised in August 2002 - a search for the nationally scarce pink sea fan (*Eunicella verrucosa*), the object being to establish a new northerly record for the species. Eight different sites were dived over a weekend, with sea fans being found at five of them. The event did produce a new northern record, one being found 2 miles north of Abercastle. However, in 2004 one was spotted and recorded from Tri-maen-trai (Site 2), and this is now the northernmost record for a pink sea fan. Our aim this year is to extend our search further north again, towards Fishguard.

There has so far been no finding of the nudibranch *Tritonia nilsohdneri*, which feeds on the sea fans, nor the rare anemone *Amphianthus dohnii*, which lives exclusively on them.

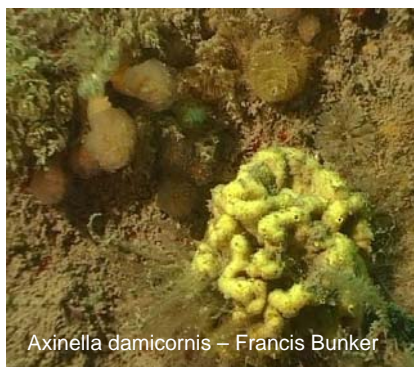


- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Site 1. V-Reef | Site 5. Penclegyr Gully |
| Site 2. Tri-maen-trai | Site 6. Huw's Reef |
| Site 3. Abermawr Pinnacle | Site 7. Strumble Head |
| Site 4. Bola Reef | |

From 2002 - 2004, a total of 2 Surveyor and 17 Observer forms were completed - not a great number, but we are hoping to increase this significantly in 2005. The large number and variety of species, however, more than makes up for the lack of forms, and eight nationally scarce species were recorded in total.

Sponges

It is apparent that north Pembrokeshire is very rich in sponges. In many of the Seasearch forms completed, the number of sponge species recorded were far greater than any other individual group. The most common were, as expected, the boring sponge (*Cliona celata*) and the elephant ear sponge (*Pachymatisma johnstonia*). However, also featuring very regularly were the hedgehog sponge (*Polymastia boletiformis*) and the branching staghorn sponge (*Axinella dissimilis*). The nationally scarce species *Thymosia guernei*, *Tethyspira spinosa*, *Plocamilla coriacea* and *Axinella damicornis* occurred quite frequently at 3 sites, V-Reef, Huw's Reef and Bola reef.



Axinella damicornis – Francis Bunker



Tethyspira spinosa – Francis Bunker



Plocamilla coriacea – Jon Moore

Anemones, Corals, Hydroids and Jellyfish

A wide range of species from this group were recorded from all sites surveyed. The most common anemone was the dahlia anemone (*Urticina felina*), with the jewel anemone (*Corynactis viridis*) and the snakelocks anemone (*Anemonia viridis*) also featuring regularly. The nationally scarce yellow trumpet anemone (*Parazoanthus axinellae*) was recorded from 3 sites, being found in particular abundance on Bola Reef.

The Devonshire cup coral (*Caryophyllia smithii*) was the most frequently recorded coral, along with dead-mans fingers (*Alcyonium digitatum*). The pink sea fan (*Eunicella verrucosa*) was found at 5 sites, and the scarlet and gold star coral (*Balanophyllia regia*) was recorded from Penclegyr Gully, Porthgain, some 2.5 miles south along the coast from Abercastle.



Trumpet anemone – Francis Bunker



Scarlet and gold star coral – Francis Bunker



Golden feathers – Francis Bunker

By far the most commonly recorded hydroid was the antenna hydroid (*Nemertisia antennina*). The golden feather hydroid, (*Gymnangium montagui*) was found in small numbers at Abermawr Pinnacle, Huw's Reef, V-Reef and Bola Reef.

Crustaceans

The large spider crab (*Maja squinado*) was frequently observed, together with the edible crab (*Cancer pagurus*). Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) were spotted at a number of sites, as were common lobsters (*Homarus gammarus*). The nationally scarce sponge crab (*Dromia personata*) was recorded on 3 occasions.

Molluscs

7 different species of nudibranchs were recorded, the most common being *Tritonia lineata*. The painted topshell (*Calliostoma zizyphinum*) was the most noted shell. Only 2 octopus were spotted, which does not reflect the frequency with which they are normally seen in the area.

Starfish, Urchins and Sea Cucumbers

The common star fish (*Asterias rubens*) was recorded on every form over the 3 years, and very small, juvenile animals were noted as common at a number of sites. The bloody henry species (*Henricia oculata*) was the next most commonly recorded. However, it would seem that the edible sea urchin (*Echinus esculentus*) which occurs in quite large numbers in south and west Pembrokeshire, is rarely found in north Pembrokeshire.

Fishes

A sunfish (*Mola mola*) was sighted on one occasion in 2004 near Strumble Head. They are seen nearly every year around Abercastle in very small numbers, but this is the first Seasearch record for the area. The tompot blenny (*Parablennius gattorugine*) and the leopard-spotted goby (*Thorogobius ephippiatus*) were the most frequently recorded fish. Different species of wrasse and the occasional dogfish were also noted.

Bryozoa

The ross coral (*Pentapora foliacea*) was recorded from 6 sites. Spiral bryozoans (*Bugula sp.*) were frequently observed.

Phylum	Common name	Number of species sighted	Common species
Algae	Seaweeds	13	Kelp Sea beech
Porifera	Sponges	29	Boring sponge Elephant ear sponge Staghorn sponge
Cnidaria	Anemones, jellyfish, hydroids and corals	20	Devonshire cup coral Dead men's fingers Antenna hydroid
Annelida	Segmented worms	6	Fan worms
Crustacea	Crabs, lobsters, prawns, barnacles	10	Spider crab Edible crab Velvet swimming crab
Mollusca	Sea slugs, octopus, bivalves, shells	12	Sea slugs Spotted cowrie Painted top shell
Bryozoa	Sea mats, sea firs	11	Ross coral Spiral bryozoans
Echinodermata	Starfish, brittlestars, urchins, cucumbers	10	Common starfish Bloody henry
Tunicates	Sea squirts	7	Lightbulb sea squirts
Pisces	Fishes	13	Lesser-spotted dogfish Tompot blenny Leopard-spotted goby
Total number of species		131	

The 8 nationally scarce species recorded and referred to in this report were *Thyrosia gurneii*, *Tethyspira spinosa*, *Axinella damicornis*, *Plocamilla coriacea*, (sponges), *Parazoanthus axinellae*, *Balanophyllia regia*, *Eunicella verrucosa* (anemones and soft corals), and *Dromia personata* (crab). This summary report highlights the need to survey the seabed around the coast of north Pembrokeshire in far more detail, to obtain a fuller picture of the marine life and habitats found there. It is hoped that many more Seasearch courses and dives will be organised in the future.

Thanks to all the volunteer divers who took part in the various Seasearch courses and events, and completed the forms that contributed to the contents of this report. The events were organised by Jen Jones, Kate Lock and Chris Wood. This report was written by Jen Jones, the chart excerpt was produced in Mapinfo courtesy of James Perrin. Photos copyright and provided by Francis Bunker, Jon Moore and John Woolford. Seasearch is a volunteer underwater survey project for recreational divers to record observations of marine habitats and the life they support. The information gathered is used to increase our knowledge of the marine environment and contribute towards its conservation. Seasearch is co-ordinated nationally by a steering group led by the Marine Conservation Society.

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